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CAMPO DE LOS SONORAENSES

OR

THREE YEARS RESIDENCE

IN

CALIFORNIA

BY

WILLIAM PERKINS F.R.G.S.

What is here!
Gold! Yellow, glittering, precious gold!
Thus much of this, will make black, white; foul, fair;
Wrong, right; base, noble; old, young; coward, valiant.
(Timon of Athens.)

1849, 1850 and 1851

On Monday evening I got on board the "Splendid Steamer, New World," where I had the good luck to find the Lieutenant Governor, Mr. Purdy, on his way up. Mr. Purdy is one of ^{my} oldest friends in California, and is one of the best fellows in the State. The people at large thought so too, when at the last election they voted him into his present position without an effort having been made by himself. I believe he did not spend an ounce in the whole canvass, that is, to secure his election.

On board the New World were also two hundred fresh arrivals from the Celestial Empire, on their way to the Northern gold-diggings. They were mostly dressed in the national costume, petticoat trousers reaching to the knees, big jackets lined with sheep or dog-skin, and quilted, and huge basket hats, made of split bamboo. The lower part of their legs are encased in blue cotton stockings, made of cloth and not knit, and are attached to shoes also made of thick cotton cloth, and with soles fully an inch in depth.

These people form a peaceable and hardworking class of our population, but are of very little service or benefit to commerce or to the state, as they consume little of the food or merchandise of the country. Rice, their great staple, they generally bring over with them in vast quantities, and when a Chinaman amasses a small amount of cash, he immediately returns home to the "flowery land." This determination seems to be in almost all cases premeditated, for none have brought their wives and children. Some time ago it was calculated that there were no less than fifteen thousand Chinamen in California, and at the same time there were only three Chinese women. Within the last six months however, Celestials of the softer sex have been speculating in the California mania. Some three or four scores of girls have come over. Their means of livelihood is uniform, and they help to add a darker shade to the profligacy of San Francisco.

The first and almost only article which a Chinaman buys when he lands, are boots; the thick, heavy, common Yankee boot, which appears to take their fancy to such an extent, that one man will often purchase four or five pairs for his own particular use.

18 the little conical, thick felt cap, shaped like a bee-hive, with the trim turned up, which we are accustomed to see on the heads of Celestials denominated our tea-cups etc, is rather a favorite title for fancy gents among our lower orders. They were adopted as a sort of uniform by a famous set of blackguards called the "Tigers", the terror of decent people in 1849, but who are pretty well thinned out now by the gallows, revolvers and liquor.

We arrived at Sacramento on Tuesday morning, and after a good look at the city, I may say I was disappointed. The town is very poor compared to San Francisco, and it seems to me that Marysville, which is situated at the head of the navigation, must eventually become much more important in a commercial point of view.

Sacramento is laid out on a magnificent scale, but it will be a very long while ere a twentieth part will be built upon, for the simple reason that there is no need of a large town at this point. It is as easy to take up merchandise from San Francisco to Marysville as to Sacramento, and there are no diggings within eighty miles of the latter place.

The only lion the town possesses, besides the Legislature, temporarily lodged here, is Butler's old Fort, which is situated about two miles from the river. Coffeyth, our representative, drove me out with Major Hammond's pair of Canadian ponies. The Fort is a large enclosure, the walls of which are built of adobes, or sun-dried bricks. The fortifications are built in the modern style. The place was intended to withstand the attacks of the Indians, and was made large enough to contain all the cattle of the establishment in case of a foray from the tribes from the mountains. The walls were defended with one piece of ordnance, a small cannon, which, considering the arms of the probable assailants, was an ample and sufficient defence. The place is going to ruin, as of course, since the advent of American immigration there is not much use for forts of protection against the Indians, but the curious old place gives rise to strange reflections, particularly when we remember that only four years ago it was the only abode of white men in a tract of thousands of square miles, and now a town of fifteen thousand inhabitants is situated here.

**Transcription of BANC MSS C-D 5179: "Three Years Residence in
California" by William Perkins**

Chapter 34, pp. 217-218:

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